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Najib delivers severe blow to Dr M, opposition

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In his own words, Datuk Seri Najib Razak said he could not believe his eyes looking at the unofficial results after he broke his fast.

He could not eat his dinner, he said, as he kept pacing the room, wondering whether the numbers were right.

The elated prime minister then decided to drive down here (Sungai Besar), about two hours from Kuala Lumpur, to be where the action was.

Describing the twin by-election wins as "extraordinary", Najib spoke to a sea of blue-shirted Barisan Nasional supporters, saying the win here could be a turning point for BN in the opposition-held Selangor.

But, he reserved his biggest ammunition for one man, saying the results proved that the people did not pay heed to the "91-year-old man" seeking his ouster.

"*Dulu cakap lain, sekarang cakap lain, dulu dia ludah, sekarang dia jilat balik*" (back then, he said one thing, but now, he says something else, back then, he spat it out, but now, he licks back what he had spat out). Where is his dignity?"

Najib, who, all this while, had been quite restrained in his criticism of Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, lashed



out at the man, who, during the campaign period, had likened him to Idi Amin Dada.

"These by-elections show that Dr Mahathir is not popular and the people have turned their backs on his 'Citizens' Declaration'," said Najib.

The twin polls started off as a tight race, but in the end, it was a resounding double victory for BN under Najib.

When the official results were out around 10pm, BN not only retained the Sungai Besar and Kuala Kangsar parliamentary seats, but romped home with a skyrocketed majority that exceeded its initial predictions.

The results reflected a decisive swing in Chinese votes back to BN in both seats. For example, BN polled more than 52 per cent of the votes in Jerlun, a Chinese-dominated part of Kuala Kangsar.

In the Chinese-dominated en-

clave of Sekinchan here, BN won close to 50 per cent of Chinese votes.

The return of the two Chinese fishermen, who had been detained in Indonesia, to Sekinchan was a big contributing factor. BN leaders had pulled off a coup by negotiating for their release and bringing them home two days ago.

A big loser was the Chinese-based DAP as its strongholds, especially among young Chinese voters, had been somewhat dented.

The results also showed a spike in Malay votes for BN, thanks to the disarray in the opposition ranks, with the breakaway of Pas from the then Pakatan Rakyat.

The heightened emotions, defaced posters and billboards, and unprecedented presence of Dr Mahathir in opposition rallies had added some excitement to an otherwise subdued Ramadan campaign.

In the 2013 general election, BN had garnered a razor-thin 399-vote majority in Sungai Besar and a 1,082-vote majority in Kuala Kangsar. This time around, the vote majority swelled to 9,191 and 6,969, respectively.

In the process, the results dealt a humiliating blow to Parti Amanah Negara (PAN), the brand-new "orange" party that is a splinter of Pas.

They also delivered a huge electoral setback to the vocal backers of PAN, chiefly Dr Mahathir and his political rival-turned-close ally, Lim Kit Siang of DAP.

With their guns blazing, both were out to embarrass Najib in the polls by campaigning hard to ensure a solid BN defeat.

They were campaigning hand in hand for both seats by playing up issues, from 1Malaysia Development Bhd to the RM2.6 billion donation. In the end, both failed miserably to appeal to the semi-urban electorates. Their rallies drew barely 500 people, mainly outsiders and non-voters.

Pakatan Harapan, the successor to Pakatan Rakyat, had turned to Dr Mahathir to fill a leadership void and galvanise crucial Malay support.

For sure, the by-elections proved to be a sweet victory for Najib, who made his way here last night at the eleventh hour, by road from Kuala Lumpur, and his deputy, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, who prac-

tically parked himself in both seats.

The by-elections were initially set out to be just about replacing the two BN members of parliament who were killed in a helicopter crash last month during the Sarawak election campaign period.

As it turned out, BN was tested on a number of national and local issues, but it handled them well. The opposition tried but failed to turn the polls into a national referendum on Najib's leadership.

BN has been riding on its track record of bringing development to the people. Here in this corner of Selangor, you tend to forget that Selangor is an opposition state.

But, the bigger electoral test was for the PKR-led Selangor government, which saw PKR, DAP and PAN pitting against Pas, despite the Islamic party being part of the state government.

It will be harder for the opposition parties to regroup in Selangor, given the deep suspicion among them.

As one BN leader quipped, it would not be a surprise if Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Azmin Ali were to call for snap state polls by the end of the year.

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